FTA Section 5303

Grant Application Program Information

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FTA Section 5303

This FTA Section 5303 Program Information and Instructions Package is provided as a guide for a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to apply for FTA Section 5303 Program funds. In order to allow the MPO sufficient time to develop and approve Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) the **Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has established May 1, as the due date in which MPO must submit an application for FTA Section 5303 funds.**

The MPO is required to submit the following application items to the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation:

1. Project Budget (Please cross reference UPWP line items to FTA budget line items) (i).
2. Authorizing Resolution (ii).
3. Commitment of Local Share. (part of item #2)
4. Federal Fiscal Year 2007 Certifications and Assurances for Federal Transit Administration Assistance Programs (ii).
5. Civil Rights Updates Certification (As required) (ii).
6. UPWP Submittal:
    a) **Large Urban Areas**> 200,000 in population are required to submit their UPWP directly to FTA for approval. **Two** copies of the approved UPWP must be included with the application submittal to DRPT (ii).
    b) **Small Urban Areas** < 200,000 in population are required to submit two copies of their approved UPWP to DRPT (ii).

(i) – Indicates the data is to be submitted to DRPT through OLGA at https://olga.drpt.virginia.gov/.
(ii) – Indicates the form should be downloaded from the **OLGA FTA 5303 Grant Application page** which can be retrieved from the web address above. Hard copies are required for these certifications and cannot be submitted electronically.

The Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation will review each MPO's FTA Section 5303 application and submit a Statewide FTA Section 5303 application to the Federal Transit Administration. Upon approval of the application, DRPT will initiate agreements with each MPO. If FTA's approval is not received prior to July 1, 2006 then DRPT will issue "letters of no prejudice" that allows the MPO to begin work on the UPWP elements July 1, 2006.

All FTA Section 5303 Application Certifications and Resolutions shall be submitted to DRPT by April 25, 2007 to the following address:

Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation
Charles "Chip" Badger
1313 East Main Street, Suite 300
Richmond, Virginia 23218-0590

If you have any questions concerning the FTA Section 5303 Program please feel free to contact Ms. Melissa Barlow, Section 5303 Program Manager at (804) 225-3746.

National Planning Emphasis Areas

The FTA has identified a series of national Planning Emphasis Areas (PEAs) to promote as priority themes for consideration in developing the annual work programs for Statewide Planning (State Planning and Research, or SP&R) and Metropolitan Planning (Unified Planning Work Program, or UPWP). The PEAs represent topics in statewide and metropolitan planning that are of strategic national importance and are proposed for consideration by State and local officials as they prepare UPWPs and SP&R programs during the next applicable annual planning program cycle. This year's PEAs broadly promote improved person mobility, while addressing Core Accountabilities of FTA's Strategic Business Plan. The Strategic Business Plan may be viewed at the FTA Web site, *http://www.fta.dot.gov* . Because of the wide range in fiscal years across the States, it is understood that full consideration to include the PEAs may not take place until FY 2007. FTA invites comments from all interested parties on the PEAs outlined in the following pages—both the planning topics that are listed, as well as the specific themes under each topic.

A dedicated program of technical assistance and informational support is being made available to States, MPOs, and public transportation operators to aid in carrying out work activities that support the PEAs. The Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program (TPCB), accessible on-line at *http://www.planning.dot.gov* , is an important component of this support, with additional resources also to be made available through the FTA Web site, *http://www.fta.dot.gov* . The TPCB is an on-line accessible portfolio of informational reports and services sponsored jointly by FTA and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) providing useful guidelines and case studies of innovative practice related to statewide and metropolitan planning. A key element of the TPCB is the Peer Exchange Program, which provides support for sharing experiences among planning practitioners of innovative practices on these PEAs, as well as other planning topics, on request. Requests for information and technical support through the TPCB can be made by accessing the Web site noted above, or by contacting the FTA Region Office or FHWA Division Office representatives in your areas. In addition, training courses that address these PEAs in a variety of planning contexts are available through the National Transit Institute (NTI) and the National Highway Institute (NHI). Please go to the following Web sites: *http://www.ntionline.com* and *http://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov*.

Finally, FTA is interested in identifying and showcasing examples of effective and innovative practice in Statewide and Metropolitan Planning that support the PEAs. States, MPOs, and public transportation operators are encouraged to forward work scopes and reports documenting their innovative efforts to their respective FTA Region Offices, so they may be reviewed and forwarded to Headquarters for national dissemination through a dedicated webpage to be developed over the coming year.

FTA has identified five key themes as PEAs for the current and upcoming fiscal year:

(1) Incorporating Safety and Security in Transportation Planning;

(2)Participation of Transit Operators in Metropolitan and Statewide Planning;

(3) Coordination of Non-Emergency Human Service Transportation;

(4) Planning for Transit Systems Management/Operations to Increase Ridership; and

(5) Support Transit Capital Investment Decisions through Effective Systems Planning.

1. Incorporating Safety and Security in Transportation Planning Since passage of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, and in all subsequent surface transportation authorizing legislation, States and MPOs have been encouraged to incorporate safety and security in their plans, programs, and ongoing planning activities. Most recently, SAFETEA-LU has expanded emphasis on safety and security by decoupling the two concepts and elevating their status as individual factors in the planning process. Communication and collaboration among safety professionals, emergency service providers, the enforcement community, and transportation planners is essential to successfully integrate safety and security into all stages of transportation planning and decision-making.

Regarding transportation system safety, information describing the tools and strategies associated with the implementation of transportation safety planning within statewide and metropolitan transportation planning processes, including resources targeted to the planning organizations, is available at *http://www.tfhrc.gov/pubrds/pubrds.htm* . A training course titled ''Safety Conscious Planning'' is available through NTI (see Web site above) with additional information available from TPCB Web site and FHWA and FTA, as follows: *http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/scp/index.htm* and *http://transitsafety.volpe.dot.gov/*

The types of planning work activities addressed under this emphasis area can include, among others, education, training, and development/application of analytical processes related to addressing safety and security in planning on a systematic basis, and development and use of approaches to considering safety and security in setting implementation priorities in plans and programs. The ''security'' component of this emphasis area refers to both maintaining the personal security of transportation system operators and users, as well as strategies for system operations that support the ''homeland'' security of localities, regions, States, and the nation. Coordinated approaches to the training of operators, deployment of communications and control technologies, and general coordination of emergency preparedness are among the types of planning activities that fall under this category.

A high-profile theme that spans both security and safety is disaster planning. In particular, areas that are vulnerable to disasters of either man-made or natural origin are encouraged to consider including disaster planning work activities into their SP&Rs and UPWPs. Examples of planning-related disaster planning activities include all stages of emergency preparedness planning—ranging from preparing multimodal evacuation plans before a possible event, to strategies for bringing emergency supplies and relief aid to affected areas after the event. Additional information is available at the following Web sites:

http://www.planning.dot.gov/Documents/Securitypaper.htm.

http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/scp/index.htm.

http://www.planning.dot.gov/Peer/Michigan/detroitSafety.htm.

2. Participation of Transit Operators in Metropolitan and Statewide Planning SAFETEA–LU expands the mandate and opportunities for transit operator participation in multimodal transportation decision-making through Statewide and Metropolitan planning. This PEA outlines a set of strategies for realizing the full potential and benefits of multimodal decision-making. A recent FTA publication, Transit at the Table: A Guide to Participation to Metropolitan Decision Making, available online and

in hard-copy, provides candid testimonials of the values and strategies for full achievement of ''transit-at-the-table'' by transit and MPO leaders from 25 metropolitan areas across the U.S.

Among the planning activities that support this emphasis area are (a) establishing program, project, and technical advisory committees that include representation and active participation by transit operators, (b) developing and monitoring transportation system performance indicators that include measures that involve public transportation, (c) ensuring that travel forecasting methods are sensitive to policies affecting the full range of modal options and that transit ridership forecasts have been validated and are credible, and (d) using criteria for setting project priorities for inclusion in plans and programs that are mode-neutral.

Training on ways to ensure that planning processes are modallybalanced and the resulting decisions mode-neutral are available through the National Transit Institute (*http://www.ntionline.com*) and the National Highway Institute (*http://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov*), with additional information available through the Transportation Planning Capacity Building Web site (*http://planning.dot.gov*) and the Travel Model Improvement Program (*http://tmip.fhwa.dot.gov/*).

Over the past two years, the TPCB has sponsored a number of transit-at-the-table peer exchange workshops, with the results posted on that Web site. The ''Transit at the Table'' report is available at *http://www.planning.dot.gov/Documents/tat.htm* .

3. Coordination of Non-Emergency Human Service Transportation Following the theme of Executive Order #13330, Human Service Transportation Coordination, SAFETEA–LU provides expanded program authority and funding opportunities to provide transit service to individuals with job access and specialized transportation needs. However, these programs, 49 U.S.C. 5310 (Special Needs of Elderly Individuals and Individuals with Disabilities), 49 U.S.C. 5316 (Job Access and Reverse Commute), and 49 U.S.C. 5317 (New Freedom) all require an extensive coordination among DOT and non-DOT-funded services, including preparation of a locally-developed coordinated human servicetransportation plan as the basis for project-level funding decisions. The plan has to be developed by local area representatives of public, private, and nonprofit transportation human services providers, as well as involve participation by the public, including older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals with lower incomes.

SAFETEA–LU further outlines that project ''competition'' for funding awards at the local level should be coordinated with the MPO. Support of the emphasis area could involve a wide range of work activities in Statewide and metropolitan planning, including forming and hosting meetings of a committee of non-emergency service providers, assemblage of a baseyear ridership profile of service users and forecasting future usage, and incorporating these programs into the public involvement programs of States and MPOs. United We Ride, an initiative of the Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility has developed a number of tools and strategies for building coordinated human service transportation systems across programs and funding streams.

Additional information resources are available at the following Web sites:

http://www.fta.dot.gov/16290_17544_ENG_HTML.htm

http://www.unitedweride.gov

http://www.fta.dot.gov/1139_ENG_HTML.htm

http://www.fta.dot.gov/1266_ENG_HTML.htm .

http://www.planning.dot.gov/Peer/Austin/austin_peer.htm

4. Planning for Transit Systems Management/Operations to Increase Ridership

A regionally coordinated, strategic approach to managing and operating transportation systems can yield dramatic improvements in systems productivity and service cost effectiveness. With regard to transit, a key criterion of operational effectiveness is the number of passenger miles traveled. FTA's Strategic Business Plan has a goal calling for an annual increase in passenger miles, discounted for employment. The ability to accomplish this is tied closely to the effective management and operation of transit systems—individually, as well as in within a regional context of multimodal systems management and operations. In addition, transit operational strategies such as fare policies, service characteristics (*e.g.* headways, transfers, frequency of stops), marketing and public awareness/information, and overall facilities maintenance on services and schedules, have a major impact on system ridership.

Work activities in Statewide and Metropolitan planning to address this emphasis area include such efforts as: (a) Convene a system operators coordinating committee to identify issues, share solutions, and establish an ongoing framework for coordination, (b) develop analytical tools and expertise in assessing the impacts of operational strategies, both in conjunction with, and as alternatives to, capital investments, (c) facilitate improved understanding and deployment of advanced technologies to improve the operational efficiency of systems, and (d) improve the tracking, analysis, and use of operational performance data in transportation plan and program development.

FTA has developed an extensive body of information and guidance to assist transit operators in developing strategies that increase use of their systems. The guidance includes technical assistance such as training courses, research studies, and proceedings from conferences that transit operators can use in developing their ridership growth strategies. This guidance is summarized in the report, ''Ridership Guidance Quick Study,'' which is posted at *http://www.fta.dot.gov/17525_ENG_HTML.htm*).

Additional information on achieving ridership growth is available at the following Web sites:

http://www.fta.dot.gov/initiatives_tech_assistance/technology/15791_ENG_HTML.htm .

http://www.tcrponline.org.

http://www.plan4operations.dot.gov/

5. Support Transit Capital Investment Decisions Through Effective Systems Planning The information, processes, and decisions of metropolitan systems planning lay the foundation for, and have direct impacts upon, corridorfocused project planning and subsequent stages of project development. There is a strong relationship between systems planning activities, more refined corridor analyses in Alternatives Analysis (or ''AA.'' an FTA requirement for advancing New Starts

projects), and their impact on subsequent project development—all within the context of metropolitan planning and decision making.

In systems planning, regional priorities among corridors of need are identified, as well as causes of the corridors' problems and a reasonable range of possible solutions. An AA investigates the range of possible modal solutions within individual corridors in much greater detail, concluding with a ''Locally Preferred Alternative'' (LPA). That LPA, in turn, goes to the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for adoption into the long-range transportation plan and is, ultimately, programmed in the Transportation Improvement Program. And, as the work of systems planning is carried forward into more focused planning at the corridor level, it becomes readily apparent that the quality of work performed in systems planning sets the foundation—and the quality of that foundation—for subsequent, more detailed planning.

Within systems planning, three planning activities have been found to be the most challenging and, if not performed effectively, to have the most significant impact on the quality and credibility of major transit investment proposals as they advance into project development. These three systems planning topics are: (a) Data, Technical Tools, & Analysis; (b) Regional Needs Identification & Corridor Prioritization; and (c) Financial Planning.

(a) Data, Technical Tools, & Analysis

There is a long and ever-expanding list of planning activities to improve the technical aspects of systems planning. These include ongoing collection of systems usage and performance to understand current travel behavior (*e.g.* onboard transit surveys and monitoring travel—by mode—that crosses a strategically picked network of screenlines), training for staff to improve their technical skills and expertise. Frequent validation checks should be performed on the travel forecasting models to confirm their reliability for use in assessing the travel implications of policy and network alternatives. Also, as improvements to MPOs' models are made during corridor-level AA studies, those refinements should be cycled back to the MPOs for use in their models. FTA staff and contractors have identified a wide range of problems with MPO travel demand forecasting models, particularly in locales with no prior experience in conducting AA studies. The ''sponsors'' of candidate projects for New Starts funding (49 U.S.C. 5309) will want to work with FTA staff *before beginning the AA Study* to examine model inputs, policy variables and assumptions, and model outputs for reasonableness.

Informational resources available to State/local planners include:

National Highway Institute (*http://www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov*), which offers the course Introduction to Travel Demand Forecasting.

National Transit Institute (*http://www.ntionline.com*), which offers the advanced course Multimodal Travel Forecasting.

Travel Model Improvement Program (*http://tmip.fhwa.dot.gov*), a joint FTA/FHWA/EPA program to support local transportation planning agencies and improve their forecasting abilities.

(b) Regional Needs Identification & Corridor Prioritization

Goals and objectives for the transportation system are driven by public input and set by local policy makers and elected officials. These should be based on needs and clearly set forth in the long-range transportation plan. Furthermore, the goals and objectives should drive not only performance measures for the existing system, but also evaluation criteria for any new projects and programs to assist in decision making. If a major transit investment is to be considered in a corridor for study and Federal funding assistance is anticipated for the investment, then project sponsors may want to include FTA's New Starts criteria among the locally developed evaluation criteria.

Systems planning involves identifying corridors with needs in accordance with a set of performance measures and establishing priorities among the corridors for further analysis. Valid, current, and comprehensive data are crucial in understanding transportation problems in the region; they also support rational decision making in formulating solutions. It is important that the planning documents and studies clearly articulate the problem(s) that are to be addressed. This will lead to the discovery the root causes of the problem(s). Knowledge of problems and causes becomes the basis for a projectlevel ''Purpose and Need'' statement in federal environmental review documentation. The identification of regional transportation problems and their causes through data collection, analysis, and forecasting is the basis for ''telling the story'' of the applicant's local conditions. Good systems planning will help to ''make the case'' for funding potential major transit investments.

Links to informational resources on this topic include:

http://www.fta.dot.gov/16231_ENG_HTML.htm .

http://www.fta.dot.gov/16363_ENG_HTML.htm .

http://www.fta.dot.gov/grant_programs/transportation_planning/major_investment/procedures_technical_methods/9949_10244_ENG_HTML.htm .

(c) Financial Planning

Effective systems planning depends upon sound, defensible financial planning. Otherwise, the plans will always remain just plans and what is implemented will not reflect the vision expressed by decision makers through the metropolitan planning process. Good financial planning, in turn, depends upon credible assumptions, for revenues, expenses, inflation, and realistic project implementation schedules. For transit service and projects, in particular, the concept of maintenance first must take precedence in systems planning. Recapitalization and the ongoing expenses of operating and maintaining (O&M) the existing system over the long-term must be considered. The applicant or proposed project sponsor should be able to demonstrate that the existing transit system can be maintained and operated at current levels of service for the next 20 years.

Development of a robust cost model for transit O&M expenses can prove invaluable in systems planning. For new projects, careful estimation of capital and operating costs should also include risk management analysis to challenge assumptions behind the estimates and consider a range of cost impacts should assumptions not hold true.

Additional guidance is available, as follows:

Standard Cost Categories for Major Capital Projects (*http://www.fta.dot.gov*;

Home b Grant Programs b New Starts

Project Planning & Development by Technical Guidance).

Interim FHWA/FTA Guidance on Fiscal Constraint for STIPs, TIPs, and Metro Plans (*http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/fcindex.htm*).